

Love me, love my ginger

By Gan Tian

The thought of ginger may conjure up words like “healthy” and “tasty,” and for some ladies, steamier sides of “love” and “warmth.”

Whatever you associate with the spice, explore the magic of the root in this two-page spread about its long history, pungent aroma and great taste.

Hidden health benefits

Ginger is considered an “oriental” spice, and for thousands of years, it has had a great impact on traditional medicine – it is hard to talk about ginger without discussing the root’s health benefits.

There is a lot of evidence that ginger is beneficial to our health in addition to tasting great. It has a long tradition of use in traditional medicine, and cultures around the globe have used ginger as both a healing compound and cooking ingredient.

Boosting circulation

Ginger is believed to aid circulation by helping the body sweat – something important when battling colds and flu. Scientists are also investigating the potential of the root to reduce the risks of heart disease. Currently, it is unclear whether its possible heart benefits are a result of its impact on circulation, or if there is another mechanism at work.

Ginger and motion sickness

Frequent travelers swear by the effectiveness of ginger at preventing motion sickness. Some studies have suggested that it is just as effective as Dramamine and other common anti-nausea aids. While these effects are still being studied, it can’t hurt to add a bit of ginger to that last meal before boarding a flight to your final destination.

Most major supermarket chains carry fresh ginger root. When choosing ginger, it’s important to choose roots that are firm and have a distinct aroma. The stronger the odor, the more aromatic it will be in your recipes.

Ginger and cooking

If all this talk about ginger has piqued your culinary curiosity, check out any traditional Indian and Middle Eastern recipes for examples of excellent use of the spice. Those cultures have used ginger extensively for centuries, and have many wonderful ways to combine it with lamb, beef and vegetables.

As a spice, ground ginger is a valuable substitute when fresh root is unavailable, but the fresh root is always preferred, both for its health benefits and its superior taste. Ginger may not be the most familiar spice or herb for foreigners, but it pays to learn more about this great root.



3,000 years of culinary history

Peggy Trowbridge Filippone, the writer of Home Cooking, shared a bit about ginger’s history. Its current name comes from the Middle English word *gingivere*, but ginger dates back over 3,000 years to the Sanskrit word *srngaveram*, meaning “horn root,” a reference to its appearance. In Greek it was *ziggiberis*, and in Latin, *zinziberi*.

Although it was well known to the ancient Romans, ginger nearly disappeared in Europe after the fall of the Empire. Marco Polo brought ginger back into favor in Europe after his trip to the Far East, and it became not only a much-coveted spice, but also an expensive one.

Queen Elizabeth I of England is credited with the invention of the gingerbread man, which has become a popular Christmas treat.

Ginger is in the same family as turmeric and cardamom, and is native to South Asia and has long been a staple addition to Asian cuisines.

It is also popular in



the Caribbean Islands where it grows wild in a lush tropical setting. Jamaican ginger is prized for its strong, perky flavor, and the island provides most of the world’s supply, followed by India, Africa and China.

The gnarled, bumpy root of the ginger plant is the source of its flavor. Although it is easily grown in tropical regions of the south, it rarely blooms when cultivated in the home. It can easily be grown in a flowerpot at home, but it must be brought indoors when the weather turns cold.



Spicy snacks

These Wanmi Ganmeijiang packs contain waxberry, but what is special is that each berry is dipped in ginger water and dried a second time for a sweet-and-sour flavor.

Luzhibao also has a Baojiang pack, full of yellow slices of ginger. Compared with other ginger snacks, this pack is much juicier and more pungent.

If you want a bolder ginger taste, try these. Hongzao Jiangtang is Chinese dates and ginger combined and pressed into candy bars. They are sticky and sweet.

For a sweeter and spicier snack, try Zisu Bingjiang, or dried ginger slices.

All these snacks are available at most major supermarkets for about 10 yuan per bottle or pack



Luzhibao Baojiang



Hongzao Jiangtang



Zisu Bingjiang



Wanmi Ganmeijiang



Chewy ginger cookies

By Derrick Sobodash

When I was growing up, my grandmother always kept several boxes of ginger snaps in her house – they were her wintertime staple.

I say “boxes” because, while it would be fun to play on nostalgia of home and hearth, my grandma’s gifts were simply not in the kitchen.

The health benefits of the ginger present in sugar-laden snacks may be questionable, but if you want the same hard, crunchy ginger snaps, virtually every mini-mart from Xicheng to Chaoyang stocks imported ones.

Soft, chewy ginger cookies are a little harder to come by.

If your home is blessed with an oven and you have common measuring cups, you can easily make your own from readily available ingredients. Familiar measuring cups are available from most April Gourmet stores.

According to grandma, ginger cookies will help keep you warm through January. Whether that’s because of the ginger or all the weight that sugar will put on is something you’ll have to discover for yourself.

Ingredients

- 2 1/4 cups flour
- 1 tbsp ground ginger
- 1/4 tsp vanilla powder
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1 1/3 cups brown sugar
- 3/4 cup unsalted butter
- 1 egg
- 1 bowl coarse sugar

Instructions

Combine the flour, ginger, vanilla, cinnamon, baking soda and salt in a large mixing bowl. Stir until they are evenly mixed. This is crucial to make sure the baking soda is spread out evenly.

In a separate bowl, mix the brown sugar and butter until smooth. You may want to use your hands to mash it if the butter is too firm. Beat in one egg until mixed evenly.

Combine the butter and sugar mixture with the flour mixture and blend until totally mixed with no flour on the sides. Heat your oven to 175 Centigrade and place the cookie dough mixture in the refrigerator while you clean up that mess you just made in the kitchen.

Pinch off one-inch chunks of dough and form into balls with your hands. Roll each ball in the bowl of Castor sugar, place it on your baking tray and press down slightly with your thumb to make a dent in the top. Bake each tray about 12 to 15 minutes, then move them to the refrigerator to cool and set up.

This recipe will make 48 cookies – quite a deal for the price.

If you are making these cookies for Chinese friends, consider scrapping the cinnamon. While foreigners roll their eyes at cucumber-flavored potato chips, locals find cinnamon – a spice used primarily for meat in Chinese cooking – a curious addition to most baked goods.

Also, most flours sold locally are designed for firm breads and noodles. You may want to ask your vendor if the flour can be used for cakes and cookies before purchase.

If you feel the cookies could use even more ginger flavor, look for a brown sugar flavored with ginger; one by Zhiyuan Foods is available in most markets.



Photos by Liu Ying

Asparagus in ginger-scented brown sauce

By Gan Tian

Faye Levy’s International Vegetable Cookbook has a great recipe for Chinese asparagus in ginger-scented brown sauce.

Ingredients

- 1 pound medium or thick asparagus
- 1/2 cup chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 tbsp plus 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 1/2 tsp sugar
- 1 tbsp rice wine or dry sherry
- 1 1/2 tsp cornstarch
- 1 tbsp water
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp minced peeled fresh ginger
- 1 green onion, minced (2 tablespoons)

Instructions

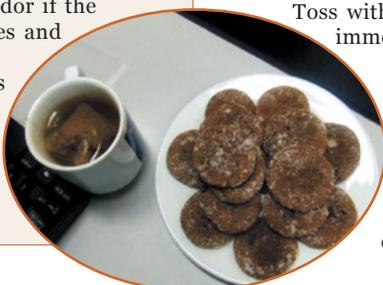
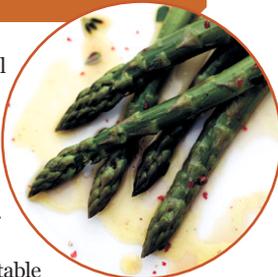
Peel the asparagus and trim the ends. Cut the stalks diagonally into 2-inch pieces. In a bowl, mix the stock, soy sauce, sugar and wine. In a small cup, mix the cornstarch and water.

Heat the oil in a wok or skillet over a high heat, then add the ginger and green onion and stir-fry for 15 seconds. Add the asparagus and stir-fry a few more seconds. Add the broth mixture and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer over medium heat for 3 minutes or until the asparagus is crisp-tender.

Push the asparagus to the side of the pan and stir the corn starch mixture into the simmering liquid, then cook 1-2 minutes or until thickened.

Toss with asparagus and serve immediately.

Note: For a more substantial main course, add a small can of straw mushrooms, drained, or eight ears of freshly-cooked or drained, canned baby corn.



Ginger, carrot and sesame pancakes

By Gan Tian

Marie Simmons, author of Pancakes A to Z, has a great recipe for ginger pancakes. These flavorful flapjacks make a great appetizer or a side dish with Asian cuisine.

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 2 cups shredded carrots
- 1/2 cup finely chopped scallions
- 2 tbsp grated fresh ginger
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1/4 cup cracker meal
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 tsp salt
- vegetable oil

Thai dipping sauce

Instructions

Toast the sesame seeds in a dry skillet over low heat, stirring until golden, or about 2 minutes.

Combine the carrots, scallions, ginger and garlic in a large bowl, and stir to blend.

Heat 1/2 inch of oil in a medium skillet until hot enough to sizzle a bread crust. Add the batter in heaping tablespoons and fry, turning once, until browned on both sides. Repeat with the remaining batter.

Serve warm with Thai dipping sauce.

Ginger Marmalade Chicken Salad Recipe

By Gan Tian

Winter is a time to be lazy, and this simple salad recipe is perfect for when you don’t feel like cooking.

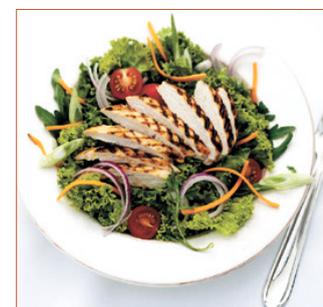
Ingredients

- 4 chicken breasts, halved, skinned and boned
- 1/3 cup orange marmalade
- 2 tbsp ginger, peeled and minced
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup roasted, jarred red peppers cut into strips, reserve 1 tbsp liquid

- 5 tsp red wine vinegar
- 8 cups mixed salad greens
- 4 thin red onion slices, separated into rings

Instructions

Place the chicken on a plate and season with salt and pepper. Mix the marmalade, ginger, garlic and mustard in a bowl. Spoon 1/4 cup of the marmalade mixture, reserving excess in a separate container, over the chicken and turn to coat. Chill the chicken



and remaining marmalade mixture separately overnight.

Preheat your broiler. Arrange the chicken on a broiler pan and broil until cooked through, about 5 minutes per side. Cool slightly. Spread your remaining marmalade mixture over the chicken and cut it crosswise into thin strips.

Whisk the oil, reserved liquid from peppers and vinegar in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Add salad greens, pepper strips and chicken, and toss to coat. Top the salad with onions.